

Movie Makers

July-August, 2000

Volume 10 No. 4

The American Motion Picture Society

Why Did it Win? Why Did it lose?

Matt Jenkins

It is intriguing to look at why a program wins in one festival and is dismissed from another. Certainly rejections are frustrating and so receiving judge's comments are always imperative.

I always advocate learning as much possible about the festival you are entering. However, it's virtually impossible to determine who the judges are and their likes and dislikes. If you have been following the re-publication of George Cushman's articles regarding festivaling in *Movie Makers*, you might remember that he considered winning as "luck." He also said " Festivals try to get competent judges but good judges are rare."

This year I entered a documentary of mine into 7 festivals and will enter it into at least one more. Out of this seven it placed in one, I'm waiting to hear from 2 and it was rejected from 4. I received judges' comments from the win and a loss. What follows is an analysis of these comments to see if a determination can be made of why did it win? Why did

it lose?

The Documentary

Before comments can be discussed, it's important to look at the documentary. Called, "The Passing of Time," the documentary's acronym is TPOT. The program runs about 11 minutes long. It was shot on S-VHS using a Panasonic SuperCam and edited on an AVID MCEXpress non-linear editor. I used a Sony mini disc recorder to record the voice overs and a Sony lapel mic clipped to the interviewee to capture on-camera audio. The music was taken from CD's. Graphics were created using the CG program included in the AVID. Videotapes for festival entries were copied directly from the AVID onto videotape. Oklahoma Educational Television felt it was well done enough to broadcast it.

The description included with the entries read: "What did people think life would be like in the year 2,000? A comparison of predictions made earlier in the 20th Century is made with what actually occurred. Mix quotations from famous individuals regarding the

future with how a cross-section of people define 'time' and you have 'The Passing of Time.'"

My intention was to show the building of a display that contained the predictions with hearing the predictions. I combined these elements with on-camera interviews of individuals defining time. And finally I put in graphics of quotations from well-known people regarding predicting the future.

These elements were edited to follow one another. A graphic of a quotation is followed by video of building the display and audio of the prediction. This is followed by an on-camera interview. This sequence was repeated in a rhythmic pattern until the end when the pattern was broken.

The Festivals

The festival that TPOT received an award in is the Broadcast Education Association Juried Faculty Competition. The Broadcast Education Association also referred to as BEA sponsors this competition. BEA is a group of broadcasting and communica-

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

Vol. 10 July-August 2000
No. 4

MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of even-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$7.00, Canada \$9.00, foreign addresses \$10.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From the Editor

It's late at night as I begin to write this column. Usually, I'm filled with exciting things to talk about. However, as I go over possible topics in my mind, all seem to relate back to one word, PATIENCE.

I'm just about finished my latest documentary. It's been edited on the AVID DV Express. The program lacks one crucial interview. This interview is not scheduled to take place until the end of July. Spaces have been inserted into the documentary where this interview is supposed to go.

Now I must remove the documentary from the AVID so another one can be edited. It's tough to be 90 percent done with a project and then have to sit back and be PATIENT.

Every summer I teach a documentary course where students write, shoot, and edit a documentary. Every student serves a crew position. As the summer progresses, I find the students get on each other's nerves and it becomes tough to preach PATIENCE and kindness toward each other. After all, this isn't brain surgery.

Since my documentary is almost completed, it's time to come up with another program idea. But my mind is totally dry of ideas! I must remember to have PATIENCE and ideas will once again come to me.

One area I'm expanding into is creating web sites for my documentaries. Just about every documentary I see on PBS or the Discovery Channel, or the History Channel has a web site associated with it. I looked at the web site connected with the documentary on the Titanic's sister ships. To me, the site didn't offer much more than the documentary did.

One site that did offer something unique was the web site associated with the documentary regarding astronaut Gus Grissom's Mercury capsule, The Liberty Bell 7. After being lost on the ocean floor for years, this capsule was recovered and is currently being restored. When visiting the site, an Internet camera could be selected to witness the status of restoration. The picture was a still picture that was refreshed every minute.

So, in the site I created for my documentary, I tried to offer things the documentary couldn't. I included a page with links to web sites of people and entities involved with my documentary's topic.

The site isn't on-line yet. I expect it to be up and running within the month.

I am interested to hear if any AMPS members create web pages and what software is used to create the pages. As always, you may e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu with your comments and suggestions.

Matt Jenkins

Could You Be a Judge?

No. 9 – November 1992

George Cushman

If you were selected to be on a judging panel for a festival, how would you judge the motion pictures you would see? If it is a large, important festival you will not be told how to judge. The committee that asked you to serve expects you to know the medium and will not constrain you with a points system you must follow.

If you are new to judging, here are some points to ponder.

First, you must determine if what you are seeing is a motion picture in the full sense of those two words! Or is it a series of unrelated shots devoid of any connection, with nothing major to say.

The picture may be well done technically with good focus, nice exposure, a clear sound track, but the theme, if it has one, wanders aimlessly about and the picture seems to be going nowhere.

If it is a documentary, is the treatment subjective in nature? That is, is the point of view that of the producer only, or is the audience considered and does the picture play to the viewers, as it should?

Is a continuity of subject, or parts of it, sequential to any degree? Are the scenes filled with action, or is the subject matter quite static?

As for the sound track, is the music suited to the theme and the action? Has it been edited to fit the cutting of the picture and does it match the mood the picture is emitting?

If sound effects are used, are they synchronized accurately? And are they consistent with all sounds, not just a chosen few? And have they been edited as well as the picture?

As for the narration, does it tell what is being shown on the screen, which is always a major no-no except occasionally for emphasis, or does it relate to details concerning the scene



which are not shown but should be explained verbally?

And the narrator, does he "read" the script? Or is his delivery spontaneous, easy to understand, and does he speak in a clear voice?

Or are you watching a drama, a story, a bit of fiction? How is the construction dramatically? Is the plot, if it has a plot, made clear for the audience? How are the characters introduced? In a new and clever manner? Is the story plausible and does it make sense? Does it draw you into the picture and make you want to find out what comes next?

Is the dialog sharp and relevant to the story's action? Does it

help the story move? Or is it unnecessary and cause the picture to drag? And does the dialog seemingly "mark time" and not keep the story moving? Is there interplay between the actors involved, or do the actors, as they talk, perform some meaningful action which helps the story.

And the conflict, does it build steadily, or is it jerky with many starts and stops?

Of the multitude of questions asked here, many will not apply to every picture, and there will be other questions that will surface, the answers for which will have a direct bearing on your judgment.

But the one greatest question you have to answer is, does the picture move cinematically? This refers not to the action in the scenes but to the story or theme: does it grow? Does it get some place or stand still? This is the one question on which the bulk of any evaluation should be given, for the movement of story or theme when created with moving images is what a motion picture is.

No two pictures are alike, and it is difficult for the most knowledgeable and experienced judge to accurately weigh the excellence of one picture against another. The above questions have to be reconsidered perhaps many times to honestly pick one picture over another, but that is a judge's responsibility. The entrant is depending on his accurate decision.

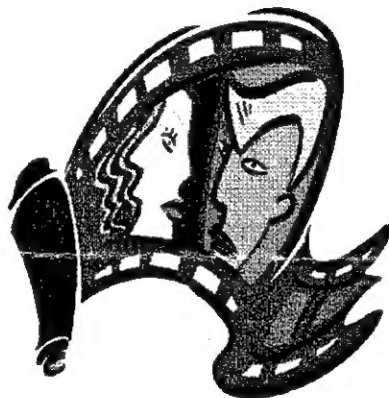
Technical Movie Clichés and Plot Devices

Jim Beach

A recent newsletter sent out by Elite Video lists these things that always seem to happen in movies. Most of these things we all will recognize after years of movie going. These are used so often that the audience has come to expect them. Perhaps some will be useful if you decide to make a fun mini movie of your own.

1. If it is a war movie, there is smoke even if there is no battle taking place at the time.
2. If there are nuns in the movie, there is always one pretty, young nun who is the love interest of the main character.
3. If there is a car chase and it goes through a small street, you can depend on a man selling fruit at a fruit stand; if it's in the city, there will always be two guys carrying a pane of glass across the street.
4. If there is a motorcycle gang in a bar, their bikes will accidentally be knocked down like dominoes.
5. If a car is driving down an alley, there will boxes in the way that the car will serve to avoid, but hit anyway.
6. If there is a telephone in front and center in the start of a scene, it will start to ring within seven seconds.
7. If it's a movie with a high school reunion, the nerdy, quiet character will always have become the millionaire.

8. If the movie takes place in the wood, they will eventually run out of food.
9. If the movie takes place on a train, someone will be hiding in someone else's sleeping quarters.
10. The special report always comes on right when the TV is turned on. The TV is turned off right after the report.
11. The dog in a movie won't just understand simple commands, but full sentences. "Go find Billy's friend," is totally within its vocabulary.
12. If a videographer is in the picture, he/she doesn't need to



look through the viewfinder to get the picture, and the reporter will be wearing trench coat, even if it is summer.

13. If the movie takes place in New England during Christmas, there will always be snow outside.
14. It only takes a minute to get picked up hitchhiking (or hailing a taxi.)
15. Only truckers pick up hitchhikers; the trucker is usually mean on the outside, but later we find out he is sensitive and warm on the inside.
16. Computers in the movies get logged on to the Internet instantly and screens always have big letters on them.

Technical continued...

Digital projection at your local movie theatre

If it hasn't happened yet it soon will. According to DV magazine, 18 out of the 100 movies presented at Sundance 2000 held at Park City Utah this year were projected by digital projection systems rather than by conventional movie film projectors.

Sundance is an annual festival of movies produced by independent producers. They range from full-length movies to short subjects and though quite professional are not produced by the major studios. Some are recorded on digital formats even the Sony VX1000 and other high-end prosumer camcorders have been used with a variety of formats ranging from miniDV, DVCAM, DVCPROD and Digital Betacam. Some are post produced and distributed on film. Many are converted to film and until now they have been projected at the exhibitions on conventional film projectors.

This year Sundance festival directors made digital projectors available at all venues and gave the filmmaker the choice of conventional or digital projection.

Of the 18 movies projected digitally, only the experts could notice the difference and most felt that the technical difference would not be noticed by a movie going audience.

Several festival organizers anticipate a vast increase in the number of digital projections

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The Script and Amateur Filming

Stan Whitsitt

Use of the written outline is one of the most neglected areas of amateur filmmaking. Most amateurs just do not use a script and the quality of their films suffers because of it.

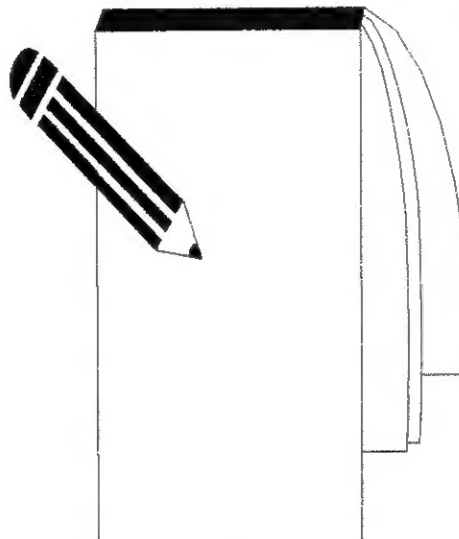
I think this due partly to the connotation of the word. The term "script" to the average person brings to mind the ponderous and complicated book used by actors of stage and screen, and it scares the bejeesbers out of them. Don't push the old panic button. A script can be as simple as a few notes jotted on the back of an old envelope. It can also be as complex as several pages of pains-taking detail. You make the call, but I'll bet you will find that the more detailed the script, the happier you will be with the results.

To overcome the Hollywood Script Syndrome, I suggest the filmmaker substitute the word "plan" for the word "script." A script is no more than a plan for shooting a film that will ensure a complete story line to communicate clearly what you want the film to say.

The first products of most moviemakers are usually record shots of the family and movies of their vacations. Almost in-

variably, these pictures when shown lack the two necessary components for a film. They rarely have a definite beginning to lead the viewer into the story, and are without a smooth ending scene. An abrupt termination of the film leaves the viewer waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Filming situations as simple as a child's birthday party, or the vacation trip, can be vastly im-



proved with a plan (script). A few notes beforehand, listing shots that can be used for beginning, transition, and ending scenes, will give a professional look to even the home movie.

So, moviemakers...start small. The next time you attend a special event you intend to film, make list of a few ideas for shots that can be used to give continuity to your story. The list will serve as a reminder, because in the excitement of filming, it is easy to forget to look for the touches necessary to shape your story into an artistic production. It is extra work to make a written plan, but the improvement in the finished product will make the effort worthwhile.

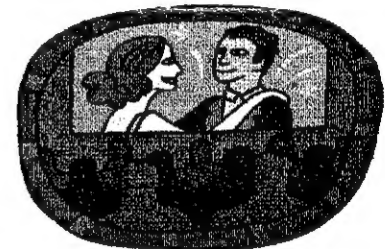
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next year, perhaps reaching 1000 to 2000.

The projectors use had very high lumen output, 5500 to 10,000 and employ DLP (Digital Light Processing) technology, which is based on Texas Instruments' Digital Micromirror Device chips.

There are, even at the present state of development, many economic advantages that will lead movie houses, particularly the large complexes to convert to digital projections.

How close digital projection aesthetics are to being up to snuff is the topic for continued debate. If the trial films that are projected can either originate form film or be shot with care on digital formats, projection will



get less of a bad rap and probably meet the same verdict that Sundance's unannounced tests had: silent acceptance.

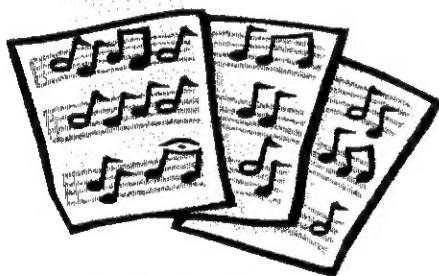
DV Magazine says, "Digital projection will ultimately be driven by economic forces, and right now it appears that celluloid will go the way of all flesh. But when all is said and done, even though all digital production pathways are cheaper and more flexible, there's one constant we can all depend on: The real quality of the work comes from the way the filmmakers manipulate the medium not from the medium itself."

Integrating Music and Video

Tom Van Horne

Music is an important component of most video and film productions. Most commonly, the music is matched to the video. In a music video, the situation is reversed. Video clips are selected to match the music. The extent to which the music is integrated with the visuals can vary greatly. I see three levels:

1. The music matches the mood and tempo of the action, but is not related to specific events.
2. The sections and/or phasing of



the music are synchronized with events and transitions in the visuals. Major films operate at this level in the extreme, with custom music written to a cue list based on the actions. The mood of the music darkens in anticipation, and then a strident chord marks the appearance of the villain.

3. The rhythm of the music is synchronized with the action. This usually involves dancing or animations such as Disney's "Fantasia."

The extent to which level 1 is satisfactorily achieved is very subjective. But, if less than half the viewers find the background compatible with the visuals, the video cannot be considered very successful. In a video lasting more than a few minutes, it is unlikely that a looped audio clip will be compatible with all the scenes.

The technical difficulties grow rapidly as we move up through these levels. Thus, most amateur videos stay in level 1. However, with the increasing use of non-linear editing systems, amateur videographers should be thinking about using level 2 effects such as changing music clips at some transitions. Without a custom score, this has to be done carefully and not too often to avoid distraction.

If a video runs more than a few minutes with music, which has little variation in style and tempo, the risk of distraction due to monotony is high. If the audio clips are changed at too many transitions, this is also distracting. Thus the editor must find a happy medium between the extremes.

(Continued from page 1)

tions professors from universities located around the world. The entrant must be a member of BEA in order to enter. TPOT placed third in the TV documentary category.

The second festival that TPOT entered and comments were received was The Rochester International Film Festival sponsored by Movies on a Shoestring or MOAS. Interested readers can find a review of the Rochester Festival in the May-June, 2000 issue. Briefly, the festival is for independent filmmakers and holds showings of the winners in Rochester each year. TPOT was rejected from this festival.

The Comments.

Beginning with the BEA competition, I received photocopies of two judges' sheets. BEA uses a points system, 1 being poor and 10 representing excellent. There were five categories: aesthetics/creativity, technical, structure/timing, professionalism, and production values. TPOT's combined score was an 87. One judge awarded TPOT a total of 48 points and the other judge awarded 39 points.

The 48 point judge only gave 8 points in the technical section. The technical section's definition was "To what degree are program elements successfully integrated?" However the judge gave no comments for the lower score. The rest of the categories received scores of 10.

The 39 point judge gave technical a score of 7 and again no comments. This judge gave production values a score of 6. BEA defines productions values as "Considering budgetary and production constraints, does the program demonstrate an effective use of the medium?" Again there were no comments. The remaining categories received scores of 8 and 9.

The only comment that the 39 point judge made was "Would have benefited from additional interviews."

The Rochester comments were summarized and sent in a letter. Dan Reardon, the letter's author indicated that it is "Movie's on a Shoe String's practice to summarize the comments...on the basis of technical quality, artistic merit, and cinematic quality."

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Here are the comments. "Our panel of judges felt your entry was creative and clever and a clever interpretation of time. Technically, fairly well done. Audio was clean and easy to understand and visually intriguing. The quotations selected were interesting but didn't tie closely to the interviews. We felt the people interviewed were not dynamic enough. The Yogi Berra quotes were especially enjoyable.

The cinematic structure seemed disjointed and did not "hang" together. The artist in the video provided some continuity initially, but was lost after showing the completed work. The transitions from one scene to the next seemed rough. Time is a difficult topic to present.

One judge suggests an interview with a scientist for a scientific definition of time."

Analysis.

It seems that the majority of the judges had concerns about the interviewees. The one BEA judge wanted more interviewees and the MOAS judges felt the interviewees weren't dynamic enough and a scientist was needed. Here are the backgrounds of the four people interviewed on camera: a boxer, a single working mother/college student, an Internet entrepreneur/artist, and a radio news director. As the producer, I felt that four was enough for such a short piece and I wanted what normal people thought about time. I guess that premise didn't make it to the judges. Also, it is apparent that the MOAS

judges didn't get the rhythmic pattern set up through editing which was intentionally broken at the end.

MOAS and the 48 point BEA judge felt that the piece was technically well done.

The BEA judges rated TPOT high on uniqueness, accomplishing its goals, and integrating production elements. MOAS said that it "didn't hang together."

My conclusion from the limited information is that the BEA judges understood TPOT and the MOAS judges did not. So further analysis into who the judges were is necessary to see if this conclusion is appropriate. However this isn't possible as I don't know who the judges were.

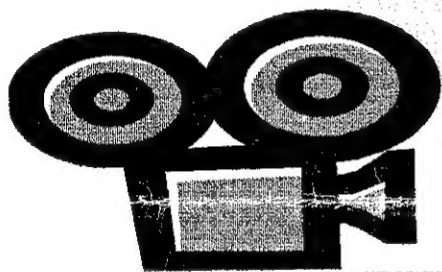
Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address for forms	Open to:	Subject	Formats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
7/14	23rd Denver Int'l Film Festival 1430 Larimer Sq, Ste 201 Denver CO 80202	ABC DE	G	M 35mm J	NONE	\$30 \$20 for student	TUV	10-12/21 Denver
7/29	45th Annual PSA Int'l Competition, %Robert Gestel, 4408 Green Valley, MO 63010-3407	ABC	G	M	20 MIN	\$7 \$12 with return	WV	10/4-9 Albuquerque New Mexico
8/15	SAVAC Int'l Amateur Motion Picture Festival % Bob Makara, 264 Hamilton Ct Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236 USA	ABC D	G	HJMNO P	20 MIN	\$10 member \$20 non member	V	10-12/15 San Jose CA
8/31	American Int'l Film & Video Festival % AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105 USA	ABC	G	HJMNO PZ	30 MIN	\$10 1st tape \$8 for 2nd tape	TUV W	To be announced
N/A Not Announced or Not Available ALL FORMATS ARE NTSC UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED								
A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independant E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4" M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8 Z MiniDV	Q Invitatat'l R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	

AMPS FESTIVAL ENTRY FORMS

That's right. It's time to get editing and finish up those videos you have been working on! The American Motion Picture Society International Film and Video Festival is right around the corner. An entry form was included in the last issue of Movie Makers." So get your videos ready and remember, you can't win if you don't enter!

If you need an entry form contact Roger Garretson at the address listed on the inside page.



From:
American Motion Picture Society
30 Kanan Road
Oak Park, California
91377-1105

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker)	\$ 7.00
Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker)	\$ 9.00
Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker)	\$10.00
Enclosed _____	

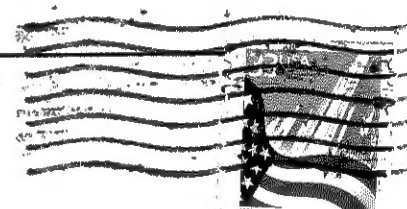
NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105



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